

LESSON

# 1 God's Plan for the Church

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Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18). This is a wonderful promise! This verse tells us several important things about the church.

1. The church is Jesus' church—“My church.”
2. Jesus has a plan for His church—“I will build.”
3. Jesus' church will not be defeated—“The gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

God had a plan for the church from the beginning of the world. It was a hidden plan. Then, at the right time, God revealed His plan. We will see that God's plan reaches into the future also. God has prepared great things for us, so we can look in faith to the future.

## *The Plan*

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- A. The Beginning of the Church
- B. The Glorious Future of the Church
- C. Present Condition of the Church

## *The Goals*

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- 1. State how God's plan for the church started.
- 2. Identify Jesus' role in God's plan for the church.
- 3. Relate God's eternal plan to present problems.

## **A. THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH**

**Goal 1.** State how God's plan for the church started.

Where did the church come from? Perhaps the church has been in your area for many centuries, or for only a short time. Perhaps someone in your community began preaching the gospel, or maybe someone came from another place to tell about Christ.

Before the gospel came to your area—even before anyone knew the gospel—God had a plan. God's plan did not begin in your lifetime, nor did it begin at the Cross where Jesus died. God's plan began before He created the world. Paul told the church at Ephesus about this plan:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. (Ephesians 1:4–5)

Then, at the right time, Jesus came. (See Galatians 4:4.) Jesus taught the truth about God and did many miracles. He began His ministry among the Jews, and many of the Jews and others refused Jesus. Then they crucified Him. But God raised Jesus back to life and established the basis for His church. Again Paul explained this to the church at Ephesus:

The mystery of Christ . . . is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 3:4–6)

The church, then, is all those who believe in Christ, from every nation. Through the gospel, they have now become part of His church.

### *Application*

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**1** Circle the letter of the statement which is true:

- a)** God’s plan began when Jesus died.
- b)** God’s plan began with the creation of people.
- c)** God was working out His plan for the church from the beginning.

**2** Read again Ephesians 3:4–6. Write in your own words the answers to the following questions:

**a)** How did God reveal His plan?

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.....

**b)** What was God’s plan?

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.....

Check your answers with those at the end of this lesson.



## **B. THE GLORIOUS FUTURE OF THE CHURCH**

**Goal 2.** Identify Jesus’ role in God’s plan for the church.

God was working out His plan through Christ. Humanity’s rejection of Christ did not stop God. Christ’s death did not stop Him. God kept on working out His plan.

God has a plan for the future, too! At the right time, He will finish His plan. He will not be defeated! The Bible tells us some

of the things God has in store for His church. Just before Jesus was put to death, He prayed:

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.” (John 17:24)

Sometime—at the right time—God will answer that prayer. Someday the church will be with Jesus and we will see His glory. No one knows completely what heaven will be like, but it will be wonderful to be with Jesus Christ!

The Bible tells us that Jesus will come to earth again for His church. Paul told the church at Thessalonica about this event:

The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17)

We do not know when this will happen. It could be very soon. God knows the right time.

### *Application*

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**3** In the following sentences, write in the correct word or words.

- a)** Because God has fulfilled His plan in the past, we can have faith in Him for the .....
- b)** One of the most glorious things about heaven is that we will be with .....
- c)** When Jesus comes for His church, there will be the sound of .....
- d)** Believers, both living and dead, will meet together with the .....

- 4 In John 17:24 Jesus asked that
    - a) God would love us more.
    - b) we would be with Him in heaven.
    - c) the Father would give the church to Him.
  - 5 Read Revelation 22:3–5. Who will rule with Christ in heaven?
    - a) The angels
    - b) The prophets and apostles
    - c) All servants of God
  - 6 Explain what God’s future plan is for His church.
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## C. PRESENT CONDITION OF THE CHURCH

**Goal 3.** Relate God’s eternal plan to present problems.

The church has a wonderful past and a glorious future, but it must live on earth now. We do not live in eternity, past or future; we live now. How can these truths we have studied help us now?

### The Purpose of the Church

Later we will look at the duties of the church in more detail, but now we must see some overall goals. We read in Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus:

This grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 3:8–10)

The heavenly realm refers to areas of spiritual conflict. The rulers and authorities are the evil spirits which cause people to do evil. Paul explains that God’s purpose for the church is to

defeat the evil spirits in this world. Look at the rest of chapter 3. The Bible says that because the church's purpose is to defeat evil, we can come boldly before God in prayer, and we must be united in love (Ephesians 3:11–19).

A second general purpose of the church is found in the last few verses of Ephesians 3.

To him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (vv. 20–21)

## Application

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**7** Look at Ephesians 3 again. State in your own words two purposes for the church:

**a)** verses 8–10 .....

**b)** verses 20–21 .....



## The Suffering of the Church

Sometimes Christians suffer because of their belief in Christ. Maybe you have been treated badly because you are a Christian. Sometimes people are hurt or misunderstood, and other people fight against them because of what they believe. This is called persecution.

Such pain is hard to understand. You might ask, “If God has such great things planned for me, why am I hurting now?” This question is not easy to answer. Look at what the Bible says.

1. *Some suffering is normal.* Everyone goes through times of suffering, whether one is a Christian or not. Even Christians must suffer. Paul told the young man, Timothy: “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”

(2 Timothy 3:12). But it is wonderful to know that when we suffer God is with us and He gives us strength.

2. *Suffering is a privilege.* It is an honor to suffer for Christ because God has special rewards for those who are persecuted. Paul told the church at Philippi, “It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him” (Philippians 1:29).

3. *Suffering is temporary.* Suffering will not last. Paul wrote to the church at Rome, “Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

4. *Suffering is rewarded.* During periods of suffering, we can look to the future, to heaven. The Bible says, “If we endure, we will also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:12). God is keeping a record.

As we have seen, God has great things planned for the church, and we can be part of that great future. But we must be faithful now even during difficulty.

## Application

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**8** In view of God’s eternal plan, why is the church sometimes persecuted?

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## Check Your Answers

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The answers to your study exercises are not given in the usual order. This is done so you will not see the answer to your next question ahead of time. Look for the number you need, and try not to look ahead.

- 8** Your answer should include these points: Suffering is normal for everyone. It is an honor to suffer for Christ. We are willing to suffer now because we will be rewarded later.
- 1 c)** God was working out His plan for the church from the beginning.
- 7 a)** To defeat evil  
**b)** To bring glory to God  
(Your answer should have the same meaning.)
- 2 a)** By the Holy Spirit through the apostles and prophets  
**b)** That both Jews and Gentiles would enjoy God's blessings through Jesus Christ
- 6** Jesus Christ will come again for His church (His people). For eternity, the church will be with Him and rule with Him.
- 3 a)** future.  
**b)** the Lord Jesus Christ.  
**c)** (any of these) the shout of command, the archangel's voice, the trumpet of God.  
**d)** Lord.
- 5 c)** All servants of God
- 4 b)** we would be with Him in heaven.